

Redeeming the Abortive Gulf: An Analysis of Chaos in *Paradise Lost*

Research Thesis

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by

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Introduction

John Milton begins *Paradise Lost*¹ in the dark realm of hell, where Satan and his cohorts scheme how best to advance after their recent fall from the glory of heaven. The council of Pandaemonium chooses Satan to make the perilous journey through chaos² to the new world, which the demons only heard of in ancient prophecy. He flies on great wings through the darkness of hell until he meets his progeny: Sin and Death. After much persuasion, Sin opens unto him the gates of hell, and he sees the dark abyss of chaos for the first time since his mighty fall: “Before their eyes in sudden view appear / The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark / Illimitable ocean without bound” (2.890-92). Through this chaos, Satan must travail to find that “new world of light and bliss” (2.867). Satan meets Chaos himself in the deep, and he offers to “reduce” nature “To her original darkness” for Chaos (2.983-84). The realm of chaos is, after all, “The womb of nature and perhaps her grave” (2.911). These contradictory elements within chaos have been the subject of some debate among scholars.³ Chaos desires “Havoc and spoil and ruin,” and yet God’s “dark materials to create more worlds” exist in this hostile abyss (2.1009, 916). Few scholars focus on the practical side of chaos as a grave, though many certainly recognize the womb. The angel Raphael describes to Adam how God the Father ordered the Son to create nature out of chaos, which provides critics with a huge amount of material to analyze. Chaos as grave appears as a threat in the early books. Speaking to the fallen angels, Satan calls it an “abortive gulf,” which “with utter loss of being threatens him” who tries to cross it (2.440-41). Satan warns his followers that chaos can obliterate angels. When Satan encounter’s chaos, it does

¹ All citations of the epic will come from *Paradise Lost*, edited by David Scott Kastan, Hackett, 2005. Print. Any references to Milton’s shorter poems will be taken from *The Complete Works of John Milton*, edited by Thomas Corns and Gordon Campbell, Oxford UP, 2012. 11 vol. Print. It will be abbreviated as *CW*.

² “Chaos” with a capital “C” designates the allegorical character in *Paradise Lost*, while “chaos” designates the realm of chaos, the primordial matter.

³ Such discussion comes up in a later section.

not bring him to naught, but rather Satan makes it through chaos to bring destruction to the world.

After the fall of Adam and Eve in Book 9, attributes of chaos are introduced into the natural world, such as war, discord, turmoil, and confusion. In Book 10, God curses the world into a lesser state of being or into a state closer to that of chaos because of the fall. God uses Death, another divine curse, to purge the world of those corruptions. Once something starts to descend into non-being, the chaotic state, it must ultimately die. Death brings all things to naught. By him, all things return to their original state of chaos. After all things return to their original state, God can create again, which happens at the end of time. Divine curses, therefore cause creatures to dissolve into a greater state of chaos, and they allow for re-creation or resurrection by God.

Those chaotic attributes, which entered at the fall, appear throughout the history of humanity in Books 11-12⁴ as revealed by the angel Michael to Adam by vision (pre-deluge) and by narrative (post-deluge). This first part of the essay will focus primarily on two events: Noah's deluge in Book 11 and the tower of Babel in Book 12. This essay will argue that the presence of chaotic tropes signifies the degradation of humanity back into a state of chaos. God then curses humanity into a greater state of chaos, not necessarily death, in order to re-create humanity. This pattern occurs several times in the last two books.

Chaotic Tropes in Contemporary Politics

Before analyzing *Paradise Lost*, it helps to contextualize Milton. During the English Civil War, chaos was in the air. The government had split apart into opposing factions: Parliamentarians against Royalists. The former consisted of a variety of political and religious

⁴ It is interesting to note that 11 and 12 were originally published in 1667 as one book, which suggest a continuous theme or topic. Milton changes the format of *Paradise Lost* in the 1674 edition from 10 books to 12 books.

ideologies but mostly consisted of conservative republicans and Presbyterians. Despite their inward differences, they all agreed that King Charles I had overstepped his political authority. The Royalists consisted of those who supported Charles. His supporters consisted of mostly political and religious traditionalists, but political moderates and Presbyterians also contributed. The two camps, though holding opposing political views, fought for the security of England. Both sides feared that their beloved nation would fall into political anarchy.⁵

While the both sides raged against the other, Milton concerned himself with the separation between his wife and himself. He wrote several divorce tracts and his *Areopagitica* (1644), but did not actively participate in the war. After the victory of the Parliamentarians, he wrote the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), which defended regicide. Subsequently, he served as the Secretary for Foreign Tongues under the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. As he watched the Commonwealth of England disintegrate, Milton warned Parliament of the dangers of restoring the monarchy in England with *The Ready and Easy Way to Establishing a Free Commonwealth* (1660). Only seven years after the restoration of the monarchy in May of 1660 did he publish *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Being thus engaged with the culture, Milton certainly knew about the several uses of chaos in contemporary political and religious discourse. The following selection of politicians and ministers do not give chaos a strict definition or develop its function. For all these writers, tropes of chaos signify evil, which they then associate with their political or religious enemies. These tropes appear in proclamations against both anarchy and tyranny.⁶ A political state of

⁵ All subsequent quotations from 17th century authors, excepting Milton, will be from *Early English Books Online: Text Creation Partnership* published by the University of Michigan. Information about the authors mentioned is derived from *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. All biblical references are from the KJV and are found within the text being referenced.

⁶ This trope seems to contradict the previous one. In anarchy, one gains power through warfare and oppression, i.e. through tyranny. See the warring atoms in *Paradise Lost* (2.898-907).

chaos, i.e. anarchy, results from a curse from God according to some writers, and it contains the potential of political - for others. Milton rather brings chaos to the forefront as an incredibly important aspect of his poem. Fundamentally, chaos and its tropes describe things which have come into disorder. They no longer exist in their natural or peaceful state of being.

In 17th century politics, moderate Parliamentarians had many issues with how the king ruled, but they still saw the role of Parliament as to preserve society from anarchy by keeping them subject to the king. Anarchy, here, is associated with a state of chaos or disorder. The great Presbyterian divine Edmund Calamy⁷ argued against those who believed that Parliament desired anarchy. In a sermon⁸ before the House of Commons (1642), he says that some thought that “Parliament had a purpose to bring in an *Anarchie*, to reduce every thing into its first Chaos, to leave every man to do what is good in his owne eyes, as when there was no King in Israel” (46). Calamy sees a similarity between an anarchic people and the original matter, chaos. For him, a return to chaos signifies an evil action, because it is a confused state where every person follows his or her own desires without any boundaries. He believed that Parliament’s duty was to preserve the kingdom. Baron Denzil Holles⁹ held much the same view. In 1642, he attempted to arrest the king for his arbitrary rule, and in the same year he made a speech¹⁰ to the House of Lords calling for the impeachment of nine lords.¹¹ Speaking to the House, he said that Parliament “under God must be the *Preserver* of three Kingdoms, and keep them firme and

⁷ Also known as Edmund Calamy the Elder, he contributed to works by the collection of authors known as Smectymnuus, which Milton argued against. This group argued against religious toleration. Though a Presbyterian, he was instrumental in the restoration and was made the personal chaplain of Charles II, but he was ejected from the ministry as a Nonconformist (1662).

⁸ Calamy, Edmund. *Gods free mercy to England* (London, 1642) EEBO-TCP (Wing C253).

⁹ Holles was an influential but moderate Parliamentarian. He came into conflict with Cromwell during the Civil War. He opposed the execution of the king, and, during the interregnum, he fled to France to avoid persecution by the radicals. He was instrumental in the restoration of Charles II.

¹⁰ Holles, Denzil Holles, Baron. *The speech of Denzell Holles, Esquire delivered at the Lords Barr, Wednesday, the 15th of Iune* (London: 1642) EEBO-TCP (Wing H2476A).

¹¹ They were in York with the king instead being in Parliament.

loyall to their King, subject to his Crown, save them from being turned into a *Chaos* of disorder and confusion, and made a spectacle of misery and desolation” (4). Holles believed that the duty of Parliament was to preserve society from descending into chaos by keeping them subject to their ruler. People descend into a state of chaos when they disobey their ruler.¹² For both the politician and the minister, chaos is evil, and societal chaos means the destruction of society.

On the other hand, radicals, such as the Levellers, found tropes of chaos under the rule of a tyrant. For them, chaos signified the destruction of society and a reversal of good for evil. John Lilburne,¹³ or “Freeborn John,” accused Cromwell and Parliament of depriving Englishmen of their freeborn rights. The new regime was tyrannical and broke with the principles of the Commonwealth.¹⁴ Parliament charged¹⁵ Lilburne with high treason, but the jury ultimately acquitted him. During the trial,¹⁶ the Attorney General had the clerk read several excerpts of Lilburne’s *Outcry of the Apprentices to the Soldiers*. In it, Lilburne accuses Cromwell of high treason, and he warns that “our oppressions are even ready to make us despair, or forthwith to fly to the prime laws of nature, viz. the next violent remedy at hand.”¹⁷ He recognizes the loss of liberty under Parliament’s rule, and, in desperation, Lilburne exclaims, “we are put into that original state, or chaos of confusion; wherein lust is become a law, envie and malice are become laws, and the strongest Sword rules and governs all by will and pleasure.” Continuing, he laments that “all our ancient bondaries and bondmarks are pul’d up by the roots, and all the tyes

¹² One cannot help but think of the creation of the world in Book 7: the Son spoke, and “chaos heard his voice” (7.221).

¹³ The Levellers originated with those campaigning for his release from prison.

¹⁴ While imprisoned in the Tower of London, he published *Outcry of the Apprentices to the Soldiers* (1649). There he argued that the soldiers fought to regulate the Crown instead of to kill the king himself. This document indirectly attacked Parliament, which had recently killed the king.

¹⁵ The trial began on the 24th of October 1649 and lasted until the 26th of the same month.

¹⁶ *The trial, of Lieut. Collonell John Lilburne* (London, 1649) EEBO-TCP (Wing W338).

¹⁷ p. 111 of the trial; p. 8 of the *Outcry*

and bonds of humane Society in our English Horizon totally destroyed, and extirpated” (111).¹⁸ Cromwell and Parliament have usurped the liberty of Englishmen by their military might.¹⁹ The series of reversals signifies a descent into political confusion: evil is honored, and good degraded. The people descend into a state of chaos and confusion. Tyranny uproots traditional liberty and society. Base passions, inherited from the fall of Adam and Eve, become the law of the land. The “original state” likely refers to that primordial matter out of which God created all things: a substance without form. It also might mean the original tribalism of Europe, with each tribe fighting the other to gain power. The nation disintegrates back into how it began, and the rule of the sword replaces the rule of law. Lilburne associates chaos with moral confusion and a loss of society. The people have descended into a depraved state of chaos under the rule of a tyrant.

Some ministers claimed God cursed or punished nations, movements, or even the Church by causing them to descend into confusion. Like the other writers, chaotic tropes signify a state of evil. After the Church of England was abolished in 1649, many diverse radical groups sprouted up in England. Interestingly, the Presbyterian minister Anthony Burgess²⁰ saw a spiritual peace governing the Church in England. In a sermon²¹ on John 17:22,²² he remarks on the unity of Christians at the present time.²³ Burgess calls religious peace a “greater mercy than all external mercies,” but he warns of a possible “spiritual judgement”: “What an heavy thing is

¹⁸ From pg. 8 of *Outcry*

¹⁹ In fact, this text sounds remarkably similar to Milton at the end of *Paradise Lost*, where he writes that Nimrod usurped power over his brethren.

²⁰ Burgess was a Presbyterian minister during the Protectorate. Despite being a Presbyterian, He published several works including *The True Doctrine of Justification* (1652). After the restoration, Burgess refused to conform to the Church of England and was ejected from the ministry.

²¹ Burgess, Anthony. *CXLV expository sermons upon the whole 17th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John* (London, 1656) EEBO-TCP (Wing B5651).

²² “That they may be one even as we are one.”

²³ Sermon 125; Burgess pp. 616-19.

it, when *Jerusalem* shall be made a *Babel*, when the Church shall be like the chaos and confusion that was made at first.” God, here, reserves the right to drive the Church into confusion, a Babel or a chaos, as punishment. He sometimes placed “a temporal one upon the enemies” of the Church (617). God might disintegrate the unity of the Church into a chaos as punishment. God chose to bless the Church with unity, but God can curse it whenever he wills. Burgess seems to ignore the diverse communions of Christians at that time, such as Quakers, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Fifth Monarchists, Diggers, etc. He might only consider particular denominations as a true church existing in England, such as the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists.²⁴ Perhaps those other Christians, the heretics, are those “enemies” whom God sometimes drives into confusion.²⁵ This minister uses chaos as something evil into which God might curse the Church. It functions as a rhetorical tool to belittle the enemies of the Church and to threaten the Church itself.

During the restoration, some supporters of the king saw the interregnum as a chaos out of which the kingdom is restored. They recognized the creative aspect of chaos, which they applied to the political changes of the day. Nevertheless, these writers still saw chaos as evil and to avoid it. In 1651, John Selden,²⁶ whom Milton²⁷ cites as the “chief of learned men reputed in this land,” published the second part of an historical treatise²⁸ on the government of England.²⁹ Closing the first chapter,³⁰ he comments that if “the King cannot rule, and the Parliament will

²⁴ He had congregationalist sympathies according to the *ODNB*.

²⁵ Burgess was against religious toleration.

²⁶ English legal scholar, scholar of Judaism, MP during the 1620s, wrote various scholarly treatises, and was imprisoned by the king in the 1630s.

²⁷ pg. 110 of Milton, John. *Areopagitica. Areopagitica and Other Writings*, edited by William Poole, Penguin Classics, 2014. Print.

²⁸ Selden, John. *The continuation of an historicall discourse of the government of England* (Edited by Nathaniel Bacon) (London, 1651) *EEBO-TCP* (Wing B348).

²⁹ Formerly attributed to the Parliamentarian Nathaniel Bacon (*bap.* 1593-*d.* 1660) who was an MP during the Long Parliament until purged and during the First Protectorate Parliament in 1654.

³⁰ “A summ of the severall Reignes of *Edward* the Third, and *Richard* the Second.”

not,” then “the whole body” is “like a Chäos capable of any form that the next daring spirit shall brood upon it” (13). Anarchy implies a chaos in which some political force³¹ can mold society according to a new design.³² For Selden, the malleability of society presents a great danger. This political state of chaos remains evil. Later Royalists saw that political chaos offered the hope of a new world. In fact, some of the Royalists saw the restoration of the monarchy as just that: a re-creation.

The poet Abraham Cowley³³ wrote a satire (1661)³⁴ criticizing Cromwell and the Protectorate government. The speaker, looking upon England, sings “Thou doest a *Chaos*, and Confusion now, / A *Babel*, and a *Bedlam* grow” (pg. 6, ll. 33-34). Cowley identified the interregnum as a state of chaos, such as the confusion of Babel. However, he does not see the restoration as a re-creation but a salvage³⁵ of the old monarchy. Chaos, here, retains its attribute of evil. Around the same time,³⁶ the Speaker of the House, Sir Harbottle Grimston,³⁷ gave a speech³⁸ in the Rump Parliament to Charles II (1660). He called the restoration the king’s peoples’ “re-Creation out of a Chaos of confusion and misery” (6). Grimston likens the restoration to the creation of the world out of chaos. Like Cowley, he identifies chaotic tropes in the government of the Protectorate. Grimston applies the creative trope of chaos to justify the restoration of the monarchy and the destruction of the Commonwealth. All three of these people

³¹ Such as Cromwell when the king was killed.

³² The creative trope of chaos can be found in Book 7 of *Paradise Lost*, where God creates the world out of chaos. It is also discussed at length in the next section.

³³ Royalist poet who fled England (1644?) to France until 1654.

³⁴ Cowley, Abraham. *A vision, concerning his late pretended highnesse, Cromwell, the Wicked* (London, 1661) EEBO-TCP (Wing C6695).

³⁵ “Yet, mighty God, yet, yet, we humbly crave, / This floating Isle from shipwrack save” (pg. 7, ll. 57-58).

³⁶ August 29, 1660. Cowley’s book was entered in the Stationer’s register in October 1660. The speech might have had some influence on Cowley.

³⁷ He was a Parliamentarian with Royalist sympathy who served as a MP during the Short and Long Parliaments (1640s), the Second Protectorate Parliament (1656), the Rump Parliament (1660), and the Cavalier Parliament (1661, ’79, and ’81).

³⁸ Grimston, Harbottle, Sir. *The speech which the Speaker of the House of Commons made unto the King in the House of Lords* (London, 1660) EEBO-TCP (Wing G2043).

still held that chaos signifies evil and ought to be avoided; but if a society cannot avoid it, then it offers the opportunity for re-creation.

From out of this tumultuous period, Milton formed his great epic. These politicians and ministers used chaos in relation to anarchy, tyranny, divine curse, and re-creation. Chaos retains in all these people a sense of evil and the forbidden. Society must not descend into chaos. If a group of individuals do become more chaotic, then they become, in some sense, unnatural. None of these texts developed an in depth theory of chaos, whether cosmological or rhetorical. Milton, on the other hand, develops a complicated idea of a cosmological chaos. His poetical depiction of it carries an association with the political uses described above. He then brings those political uses into his depiction of postlapsarian society in Books 10-12 of *Paradise Lost*. Before approaching the postlapsarian world's descent into chaos, this essay must come to a definition of the cosmological chaos.

The Good Cosmic Chaos

For Milton, chaos does retain its association with evil, but that association depends on how one approaches chaos. The cosmological chaos,³⁹ this essay will argue, is fundamentally good. Nature is also good, because both nature and chaos exist according to the will of God. Once nature begins to dissolve into chaos in Book 10, then tropes of chaos within nature are evil. The evil of chaos is relative to what one is comparing it. God ordained created beings to exist, and therefore their dissolving to into a state of non-being is evil.

In *De Doctrina Christiana*,⁴⁰ Milton develops an idiosyncratic⁴¹ conception of the world

³⁹ The actual realm of unformed matter out which God creates and through which Satan travels.

⁴⁰ All English citations of Milton's *Christian Doctrine* will be taken from *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, edited by Don M. Wolf, Yale UP, 1953-82. 8 vols. Print. This series will be abbreviated as *CPW*. All Latin quotations of *De Doctrina* will come from *The Works of John Milton*, edited by Frank Allen Patterson, Cambridge UP, 1933. 18 vols. Print. This collection will be abbreviated as *Works*.

⁴¹ The best defense I have read of glossing *Paradise Lost* with *De Doctrina* is Maurice Kelley's *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's "De Doctrina Christiana" as a Gloss upon "Paradise Lost,"* Princeton: Princeton

as created by God. He draws a distinction the between the role of God and the Son in forming creation: God “comprehends within himself all lesser causes.⁴² But the Son is only he *through* whom all things are” (CPW, 6: 302).⁴³ God wills all things that are into existence, not the Son. The Father is the principle cause of all things, because he embraces or contains all inferior causes within himself: “For the Father is not only he *by* whom, but also he *from* whom,⁴⁴ *in* whom,⁴⁵ *through* whom,⁴⁶ and *on account of* whom⁴⁷ all things” receive their existence (CPW, 6: 302).⁴⁸ He uses the Son as an instrument to form creatures. Because God comprehends all causes within himself, Milton reasons that “So the material cause must be either God or nothing” (CPW, 6: 308).⁴⁹ All matter must be composed of the divine substance. After explaining why creation *ex nihilo* cannot be true, he provides a lengthy explanation of why matter must proceed from the substance of God. With Milton’s belief that material substance emanates out of God, the realm of chaos in *Paradise Lost* is in some sense divine. When Satan encounters the allegorical figure of Chaos, he makes a deal with Chaos. If Chaos sides with Satan, then is it evil? It is important to understand how the cosmological chaos functions in the poem, because the function changes how the chaotic tropes found in the postlapsarian world can be interpreted.

Although the substance of chaos originates from God, a divide exists between chaos and God. As Walter Clyde Curry⁵⁰ points out, chaos emanated “from the all-comprehending and all-

UP, 1941. Print. He corrects some mistakes found in Arthur Sewell’s classic *A Study in Milton’s Christian Doctrine*, London: Oxford UP, 1939. Archon, 1967. Print. Kelley also edited the edition of *De Doctrina* in CPW vol. 6.

⁴² Milton follows Aristotle in naming the four inferior causes: “efficient, material, formal and final”; “efficientem, materialem, formalem et finalem” (CPW, 6: 307; *Works*, 15: 20)

⁴³ “omnes causas inferiores in se complectatur: filius duntaxat est per quem omnia” (*Works*, 15: 8)

⁴⁴ efficient

⁴⁵ material

⁴⁶ formal (designs the being)

⁴⁷ final

⁴⁸ “est enim pater non solum a quo, sed etiam ex quo, in quem, per quem, et propter quem sunt omnia” (*Works*, 15: 8)

⁴⁹ “Materialis igitur causa erit aut Deus aut nihil” (*Works*, 15: 20)

⁵⁰ Curry, Walter Clyde. *Milton’s Ontology, Cosmology, and Physics*, UKP, 1957. Print.

embracing First Cause,” and “it acquired an external, passive existence in time” (34). After emanation out of God, chaos acquires a distinct existence of its own. This external existence allows God, the Father, to remain numerically one. He exists hypostatically⁵¹ as one without division. To understand this concept of the matter, Curry looks to Milton’s *Ars Logica*:

Milton divides matter into primary and secondary; the secondary into proximate and remote. It is this primary matter which is a merely passive principle and ontologically prior to all its differentiations. The remote-secondary matter is the substance of chaos, which is the substrate of generation and corruption. (36)

All things exist “potentially” in the substance⁵² of the Father. The primordial matter first emanates out of God, which is now external to the *hypostasis*,⁵³ or essence, of God. This primordial matter has no essence of its own, and thus it has no will. Its existence is “passive,” because it requires some being with will to act upon it. Chaos, nature, and all the essences within nature are not God himself, but all emanations *ex Deo* exist “‘within’ the infinity of God.” God is present everywhere and fills everything “subject to extension and division” (42-43).⁵⁴ Through his substance, God exists in the realm of chaos and all things formed out of it.⁵⁵

With all creatures being formed from the divine substance, the fact that some creatures

⁵¹ As a person or essence.

⁵² Or *substratum*. It is the stuff of which God exists. It is God, but, as will be shown, God can generate his substance into an existence essentially other than himself. That is, he separates the substance from his *hypostasis* or *essence*.

⁵³ The word *hypostasis*, “which is variously translated *substance*, *subsistence*, or person, is nothing but that most perfect essence by which God exists from himself, in himself, and through himself. For neither *substance* nor *subsistence* can add anything to an utterly complete essence, and the word person, in its more recent use, means any individual thing gifted with intelligence, while *hypostasis* means not the thing itself but the essence of the thing in the abstract. *Hypostasis*, therefore, is clearly the same as essence” (*CPW*, 6: 140-42). “hypostasini proinde illam Heb. i. 3. quam alii vel substantiam vel substantialem, vel personam vertunt, nihil esse aliud quam essentiam ipsam perfectissimam, qua Deus a se, in se, et per se est; essentiae enim absolutissimae neque substantia neque subsistentia quicquam addunt, et persona recentiore usu quodvis individuum intellectu praeditum significat, cum hypostasis non ipsam ens sed entis essentiam in abstracto, quod aiunt designet: hypostasis ergo plane idem quod essentia est” (*Works*, 14: 40-42).

⁵⁴ Curry calls Milton’s theological relationship between God and creation as “mystical theopantism” (43).

⁵⁵ “I am who fill / Infinitude, nor vacuous the space” (7.168-69).

sin poses a potential threat to Milton's theology. As he writes in *De Doctrina*, "it is not the matter nor the form which sins" (CPW, 6: 309).⁵⁶ This primary matter contains substance, which consists of potentialities⁵⁷ for creation and destruction. Once these potentialities pass into "actuality" they receive a distinct essence⁵⁸ from the Father (38). These independent essences are "the property of another," and thus "what is to prevent its being infected and polluted, since it is now in a mutable state, by the calculations of the devil or of man, calculations which proceed from these creatures themselves?" (CPW, 6: 309)⁵⁹ All matter, including the original matter of chaos, can only be manipulated according to the will of a creature.⁶⁰ God forms nature through the Son in Book 7. Chaos cannot threaten what God has willed to exist of its own volition: "what I will is fate" (7.174). As Satan approaches the nature, he sees that chaos retires as a "broken foe" (2.1039). It cannot break the "appointed bounds" that God proscribed for the world (7.167).

Milton's Chaos cannot cross the bounds, which God declared by his Word. Satan, as a spirit formed from the original matter⁶¹ and entrusted with free will, can disobey the will of the Deity. During Satan's confrontation with Chaos, Chaos complains that he lost parts of his territory to hell and nature (2.998-1006). He then sides with the devil: "Go and speed; / Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain" (1008-09). It appears that Chaos is evil, because he desires destruction and allies himself with Satan. However, Milton claims the opposite to be true in his *De Doctrina*:

For this original matter was not an evil thing, nor to be thought of as worthless: it was

⁵⁶ "sed nec materia nec forma peccat; egressa tamen ex Deo (*Works*, 15: 24)

⁵⁷ "Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire, / But all these in their pregnant causes mixed / Confusedly" (2.913-14)

⁵⁸ Although Chaos exists outside of the Father's essence too, chaos has no essence of its own.

⁵⁹ "et alterius facta quid vetat, quin iam mutabilis per ratiocinia Diaboli atque hominis ab ipsis prodeuntia contagionem contrahat et pulluatur" (*Works*, 15: 24).

⁶⁰ In other words, a creature turns itself evil. The matter is passive.

⁶¹ Satan's birth is not recorded, but Milton's theology demands that angels too were formed out of the matter, which emanated from God.

good, and it contained the seeds of all subsequent good. It was a substance, and could only have been derived from the source of all substance. It was in a confused and disordered state at first, but afterwards God made it ordered and beautiful. (CPW, 6: 308)⁶²

Milton writes in prose that chaos is good, but his poem suggests otherwise.

Critics have tried to explain this apparent contradiction in several ways. Dennis Danielson (1982),⁶³ argues that chaos is good by virtue of the “eternal process of Nature as a whole.” He explains that “the more or less evil which perpetually surrounds partial natures is absorbed into the perfection of wholes” (72). In other words, chaos, too, contains the potential⁶⁴ for creation, the seeds, which makes it good. Against this view chaos as good, Regina Schwartz (1988)⁶⁵ fights with a vengeance. She draws on Old Testament laws of purity to show that Milton depicts chaos as unclean. Commenting on 2.912-14,⁶⁶ she points out that “Its mixtures and confusions violate all laws of sanctity” (17). The fact that chaos contains mixture of diverse potential⁶⁷ essences within its substance makes it unclean. Chaos threatens nature⁶⁸ with “death, decay, and dissolution”; with “loss of identity” (19). As Milton writes in *De Doctrina*, “All entity is good: nonentity, not good” (CPW, 6: 310).⁶⁹ However, Chaos is that which God created it to

⁶² “neque enim materia illa res mala est, aut vilis existimanda, sed bona, omnisque boni postmodum producendi seminarium; Substantia erat, nec aliunde quam ex fonte omnis substantiæ derivada, indigesta modo et incomposita, quam Deus postea digessit et ornavit.” (*Works*, 15: 22)

⁶³ Danielson, Dennis Richard. “God and Chaos.” *Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy*, Cambridge UP, 1982, pp. 24-57. Print.

⁶⁴ Curry identifies “Chaos with infinity and Old Night with supercelestial place” (63), because of his examination of pagan understandings of chaos and night. Moreover, “In chaos or the last composite body, then, [night] is responsible for the presence of forms if only in a vestigial state” (64).

⁶⁵ Schwartz, Regina M. “‘And the sea was no more’: Chaos versus creation.” *Remembering and Repeating Biblical Creation in Paradise Lost*, Cambridge UP, 1988, pp. 8-39. Print.

⁶⁶ “Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire, / But all these in their pregnant causes mixed / Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight”

⁶⁷ Following Curry and Danielson, she writes “Both contraries are potential in chaos,” that is, chaos is both a potential womb and grave (18).

⁶⁸ Schwartz points to the “conflict” between the Son and chaos to show that chaos is the enemy of God (30-31).

⁶⁹ “Ens omne es bonum, non ens non bonum” (*Works*, 15: 26)

be: “The womb of nature and perhaps her grave” (2.911). It contains the potentiality for creation and destruction. Yes, non-entity is not good, but that only works in relation to the volition of an essence.⁷⁰ How can that which lacks a will disobey God? Concerning creation, Uriel reports that “Confusion heard his voice, and wild uproar / Stood ruled” (3.710-11).⁷¹ God ordains chaos to be non-entity, formless. It, therefore, cannot be properly called evil, when it has not disobeyed God: “But in fact, matter was not, by nature, imperfect. The addition of forms (which, incidentally, are themselves material) did not make it more perfect but only more beautiful” (*CPW*, 6: 308).⁷² Chaos is complete in and of itself, because it exists according to the will of God with all the potential essences. By creating nature, God adorns an unessential chaos with essences. Once God wills these creatures into existence, then they are to remain as individual essences. If they choose to disobey, they refuse to accept their God-given being and descend back into that chaotic state out of which God created all things. To conclude, Milton’s chaos of *Paradise Lost* is still good, because it exists according to the divine will.

On the other hand, God created hell, but that does not make it intrinsically good by existing according to divine will. As Schwartz rightly claims, loss of identity “is not simply an ontological category; it is a moral judgement” (21). God forms hell⁷³ via “curse” *ex materia* of chaos (2.622). Hell, properly speaking, is the creation of the evil, the grave or non-entity, existing within the substance of chaos. Thus, hell still contains an essential reality, but its essence almost disintegrates back into the chaos from which it came. In a manner of speaking, it is an

⁷⁰ Chaos does violate Jewish purity laws, but that does not make it evil. It only means that creatures, such as the Israelites, ought not to descend back into chaos. They ought to follow the will of God.

⁷¹ When the Son said silence, “chaos heard his voice” (7.221)

⁷² “sed materia non erat in suo genere imperfecta, accessione duntaxat formaram (quæ et ipsæ materiales quoque sunt) facta ornatior” (*Works*, 15: 22).

⁷³ Schwartz finds similarities between chaos and hell, because hell too has “mixtures” (23): “O’er many a frozen, many a fiery alp, / Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death, / A universe of death, which God by curse / Created evil, for evil only good, / Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds / Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things, / Abominable, inutterable...” (2.620-26).

essential or living death: “A universe of death, which God by curse / Created evil, for evil only good, / Where all life dies, death lives” (2.622-24). God created hell by curse before he created the world by fiat. Although hell is evil, it still serves the good as existing according to God’s will.

In addition, the cosmological chaos provides a necessary function of allowing free will to exist in *Paradise Lost*. God, Danielson points out, “retires”⁷⁴ himself in order to provide the matter, the potentiality, which will receive form in his positive act of creation” (49). God is free to “act or not” (7.172),⁷⁵ and he restricts himself to allow chaos to exist.⁷⁶ God then brings the potentialities within chaos into existence as a creative act. Danielson notes that “man, if he obeys God, will be creative and free after the pattern that God has thus set before him” (49). The “if” clause there ought to be emphasized. Both chaos and humanity have the potential for great goodness but also great evil. As Benjamin Meyers⁷⁷ (2006) puts it, human ontology derives from “the liberation of matter from the divine being.” The “being” of humanity “consists in their becoming, or at any rate their intrinsic potency for becoming” (111). Humans also carry the potency for unbecoming; that is, they can nearly⁷⁸ disorganize⁷⁹ back into the confused and

⁷⁴ “Though I, uncircumscribed myself, retire / And put forth not my goodness, which is free / To act or not, necessity and chance / Approach not me, and what I will is fate” (7.170-73)

⁷⁵ “CREATION is that act by which GOD THE FATHER PRODUCED EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS BY HIS WORD AND SPIRIT, that is, BY HIS WILL, IN ORDER TO SHOW THE GLORY OF HIS POWER AND GOODNESS” (CPW, 6: 300). “CREATIO est qua DEUS PATER VERBO ET SPIRITU SUO, hoc est, SUA VOLUNTATE QUICQUODEST RERUM PRODUXIT AD PETEFACIENDAM POTENTIAE, ET BONITATIS SUAE GLORIAM” (Works, 15, 4).

⁷⁶ Schwartz suggests some moral culpability on God’s part if he chose not to create (37). Milton would surely take offense at her suggestion, because she fails to distinguish a moral difference between God and his creatures.

⁷⁷ Meyers, Benjamin. “The Freedom of God.” *Milton’s Theology of Freedom*, Walter de Gruyter, 2006, pp. 93-112. Print.

⁷⁸ Milton determines that complete annihilation of any creature is inconsistent with the nature of God: “It is not consistent, then, with the goodness and wisdom of God, to make out of an entity, which is good, something which is not good, or nothing. Moreover God cannot annihilate anything, because by making nothing he would both make and not make at the same time, which involves a contradiction” (CPW, 6: 310). “ex ente igitur et bono non bonum facere sive nihil, nec bonitati nec sapientiae Dei consentaneum est. Non potest autem Deus, quia nihil faciendo, facere simul et non faceret, quod contradictionem infert” (Works, 15:, 26).

⁷⁹ At the end, things are “finally either received into an unchanging state with God forever, or else for ever thrown away” (CPW, 6: 300). “tum demum immutabili statu in omne ævum vel as se recipienda, vel ab se reiicienda errant” (Works, 15: 2).

formless matter out of which they were created. The potentiality of chaos must be “harnessed” by evil in order to create evil (53). In fact, Satan creates evil when he meets Chaos and Night for the first time. After the dialogue⁸⁰ between Satan and Chaos, Chaos directs Satan toward nature’s “outmost works,” the edge of chaos (2.1039). Satan incarnates evil, or a movement toward non-being, through his choice to disobey God, who is the source of life. Until this moment, chaos lacked an essential reality to actualize the evil, which exists only potentially within the substance of chaos. Now “Sin and Death amain / following his track, such was the will of Heaven, / Paved after him a broad and beaten way” (2.1024-26). Only after Satan enters chaos can Sin and Death enter into actual existence within chaos, which existed only as a potential reality before.⁸¹ Chaos, therefore, is essential to freedom of choice in *Paradise Lost*. It allows volitional creatures to manipulate it and all things created out of it.

To recap, the first matter consists of the divine substance, which implies that God fills all things to a greater or lesser degree. The conflict between chaos and nature signifies non-being against being. Being and non-being contain the potential to move toward each other. Chaos, non-being, contains the potential to become living essences in nature. Nature has the potential to decay back into chaos because of human volition. Chaos lacks volition, and it cannot violate God’s commandments and become morally evil. Creatures with volition, such as angels and humans, have the capacity to disobey due to free will. To disobey is to move contrary to one’s ordained state. A fallen human or angel moves away from its ordained state of being toward non-being, which constitutes a moral evil. Some critics claim that chaos is morally evil despite its lack of volition. This essay has rather argued that Milton’s chaos is fundamentally good for two

⁸⁰ 2.968-1009

⁸¹ Sin and exists potentially in Paradise but are actualized after the fall: “Sin there in power before, / Once actual, now in body and to dwell / Habitual habitant; behind her Death / Close following...” (10.586-89) For an in-depth discussion of evil entering Paradise, see Danielson pp. 51-53.

reasons: First, chaos holds God's "dark materials" with which he creates nature (2.916). Second, it exists according to the manner in which God emanated it out of himself. It does not cross pre-ordained boundaries as Satan does when he enters the natural realm. The creative act of God upon chaos reveals a pattern of creative freedom, which humans ought to follow. At the eschaton, God will dissolve all creation back into chaos and then create anew.⁸² He will also dissolve volitional entities, who have turned away from God and toward non-being, nearly to naught, and God will imprison them in hell.

The Curse of Chaos: God's Plan for Redemption

Having established the nature of chaos, this essay now turns to the postlapsarian function of chaos in *Paradise Lost* Books 10-12. After the fall of Adam and Eve, the world exhibits chaotic properties, as Schwartz points out: "at the fall, chaos is come again, physically, morally, and psychologically" (33).⁸³ Properly speaking, chaos, which exists passively, did not enter creation, but nature moved towards non-being. God orders the angels to change the incorrupt natural world to a corrupted one. The Son tells Adam, "Cursèd is the ground for thy sake" (10.201). Then the Father orders the angels to alter the created universe to a fallen state (10.649-714). The divine imperative functions as a curse on nature, which dissolves into a more chaotic state. The clearest sign of nature's descent into chaos is the presence of Discord. Milton first introduces this character as the last member of Chaos' and Night's entourage: "And Discord with a thousand various mouths" (2.967). Discord functions as an allegorical representation of an attribute of the realm of chaos. After the fall, "Discord, first / Daughter of Sin, among the irrational / Death introduced through fierce antipathy" (10.707-09). The order of the nouns

⁸² Michael explains to Adam that the Son is "to dissolve / Satan with his perverted world, then raise / From the conflagrant mass, purged and refined, / New heavens, new earth." (12.546-49)

⁸³ For more detail, see pp. 37-39.

“Death” and “Discord” in the sentence make it difficult to discern who introduced whom. Either way, these two characters involve themselves in the animal world.⁸⁴ Elements of chaos have clearly appeared in the natural world, which means that Satan has kept his promise: nature has begun to “reduce / To her original darkness” (2.983-84). In chaos, “pregnant causes mixed,” and they “must ever fight” (2.913-14). On postlapsarian earth, “Beast now with beast ‘gan war, and fowl with fowl, / And fish with fish” (10.710-11). Discord and Death have introduced war and violence. The irrational creatures did not stand “much in awe / Of man, but fled him or with countenance grim / Glared on him passing” (10.712-14). The trope of chaotic disorder, or discord, enters into the animal world. The natural order of creation with humanity at the top of the natural order with all animals living in harmony has broken down. Perpetual conflict has entered the world, signaling its descent into chaos.

Once Sin and Death were only a potential threat, but then humanity opened their entrance into the world by sinning against God. However, God reveals that Death has a purgative function in nature. As the Father explains, Satan, Sin, Death, and the fallen angels “know not that I called and drew” Sin and Death “thither, / My hellhounds, to lick up the draff and filth / Which man’s polluting sin with taint hath shed” (10.629-31). Sin enters from the disobedience of humanity, and Death⁸⁵ results from the divine curse, which the Son proclaimed upon humanity after the fall. Nature has descended into a more chaotic state, which means that essences of nature now become corrupt. These beings fall into a living state of non-being, such as those animals that war with one another. Death kills, or brings entities into non-entity, anything with, what Sin calls, his

⁸⁴ From John Milton’s “At a solemn Musick: “That we on Earth with undiscording voice / May rightly answer that melodious noise; / As once we did, till disproportion’d sin / Jarr’d against natures chime, and with harsh din / Broke the fair musick that all creatures made / To their great Lord” (CW, 3:21-22, ll. 17-22).

⁸⁵ For the similarities between Death and Chaos, see pp. 206-08 from Zamir, Tzachi. “Death, Life, and Agency in *Paradise Lost*.” *Milton Studies*, vol. 56, 2015, pp. 201-30. *OhioLINK Electronic Journal Center*, rave.ohiolink.edu/ejournals/article/342621482.

“fatal dart / Made to destroy” (2.786-87). By bringing things to naught, he returns living things back into a state of chaos, or non-being. God requires Death to “lick up the draff and filth,” which means that death sends corrupted things back into a state of oblivion. Death preserves the fallen nature by dissolving corrupted entities back into the unessential⁸⁶ chaos. At the end of time, the Son will “sling” Sin and Death “and yawning grave, at last / Through chaos hurled,” to “obstruct the mouth of hell / Forever and seal up his ravenous jaws” (10.633-37). Then heaven and will be purified, and there will be no more draff and filth for Death to lick up. For now, the Father ordains Sin and Death to have a limited reign over his corrupted creation in order to preserve it until the appointed time. God maintains the fallen world the by “curse” of death, which means that he sends corrupted things back into unessential state of chaos (10.640).

Opposing the view of a chaotic presence in nature, John Rogers⁸⁷ understands the “possibility of a chaotic resurgence”⁸⁸ to have “no meaningful role in the poem’s cosmology.” He rather locates its meaning in “Milton’s fear, perhaps not so unsound, of an ever-encroaching political chaos” (142). Rogers might be right in reading Milton’s politics into this threat, but it certainly does not lack a “meaningful role” in Milton’s cosmology. The threat of total destruction looms heavily over creation. As Michael explains to Adam, the Son is “to dissolve / Satan with his perverted world, then raise / From the conflagrant mass, purged and refined, / New heavens, new earth.” (12.546-49) At the Second Coming, corrupted nature will disintegrate back into its original state of formless substance. God via the Son will give nature back to chaos, and then they will create a new nature. The threat of all entities returning to non-entity is not an

⁸⁶ Unessential means that chaos contains no essences. The creatures die, and lose their essences. That implies that they revert back into the formless matter of chaos.

⁸⁷ Rogers, John. “Chaos, Creation, and the Political Science of *Paradise Lost*.” *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton*, Cornell UP, 1996, pp. 103-43. Print.

⁸⁸ “Lest total darkness should by night regain / Her old possession” (4.665-66)

“ontologically absurd threat” as Rogers believes (142). In *De Doctrina*, Milton claims that a consequence of his doctrine of creation *ex Deo* is that “no created thing can be annihilated” (*CPW*, 6: 310).⁸⁹ He then proceeds to give several reasons for why that is true. However, in a later chapter of the same treatise, Milton changes his opinion slightly: “Whether this end means the actual abolition of the world’s substance, or only a change in its qualities, is uncertain, and does not really concern us” (*CPW*, 6: 627).⁹⁰ Milton seems to follow the former belief in the poem. Satan⁹¹ cannot entirely be dissolved without compromising his essential existence; he will exist on the brink of dissolution in hell.⁹² The corrupted nature, on the other hand, might dissolve completely,⁹³ but God will not destroy his divine substance. The phrase “purged and refined” harkens back to the first creation of Book 7,⁹⁴ but it also resembles Milton’s theological treatise: things are “then finally either received into an unchanging state with God for ever, or else for ever thrown away” (*CPW*, 6: 299).⁹⁵ God will lock Satan and company in hell, an essential place closely resembling chaos, for all eternity, and he will use chaos to destroy his earthly creation. Then he will raise it up again like how he raised his Son out of the grave.⁹⁶ The cosmological and theological significance of chaos cannot be understated.

The cosmological chaos has a purgatorial function, because corrupted nature must dissolve back into chaos to be resurrected anew. The elements of chaos already present in

⁸⁹ “non posse quicquam rerum creatarum in nihilum interire” (*Works*, 15: 26)

⁹⁰ “quæ utrum ad substantiæ abolitionem an ad qualitatem duntaxat immutationem future sit, incertum est et nostra parum refert” (*Works*, 16: 368)

⁹¹ Human beings, made of base matter unlike angels, can dissolve completely (mortalism), but God will resurrect them. By so doing, he preserves their essences from eternal oblivion.

⁹² “Then all thy saints assembled, thou shalt judge / Bad men and angels; they arraigned shall sink / Beneath thy sentence; hell, her numbers full, / Thenceforth shall be forever shut” (3.330-33).

⁹³ “Meanwhile / The world shall burn and from her ashes spring / New Heaven and earth” (3.333-35).

⁹⁴ See n. 42 on pg. 11.

⁹⁵ “tum demum immutabili statu in omne ævum vel ad se recipienda, vel ab se reiicienda errant” (*Works*, 15: 2).

⁹⁶ From Milton’s “On Time”: “we shall for ever sit, / Triumphant over Death, Chance, and Thee O Time” (*CW*, 3:19-20, ll. 21-22).

creation after the fall show the movement of nature toward chaos, entity toward non-entity. It foreshadows the eschaton when the Son comes again in glory. God keeps nature in existence by having Death bring to naught those corrupted entities, which all result from the pollution of sin. As Adam remarks later concerning the ultimate redemption by the Son: “all this good of evil shall produce, / And evil turn to good, more wonderful / Than that which by creation first brought forth / Light out of darkness” (12.470-73). God may cause beings to become more chaotic in order to first destroy and then re-create, kill and resurrect. In Books 11-12 of *Paradise Lost*, Milton shows God cursing the world several times into a greater state of chaos or non-being, only to re-create it, to save it.

Before the great flood, Michael shows Adam in a vision all the terrible things that his progeny will perform. Their actions reveal the presence of chaotic tropes within the human race like its presence in the natural world. Human beings move toward non-being by disobeying God with their free will. God then gives humanity completely over to chaos (non-being) to re-create the world with the surviving beings on the ark. The grave of chaos, of the flood, becomes purgative. When the “brazen throat of war had ceased to roar,” the people “turned” to “luxury and riot, feast and dance, / Marrying or prostituting, as befell, / Rape or adultery, where passing fair / Allured them; thence from cups to civil broils” (11.713-18). The pre-delugian humans partook of that same “Outrage” brought about by Discord in the animal kingdom (10.706-09). The humans lack harmony and create discord amongst one another, and individuals and tribes slaughter one another. When they have had their fill of war, they participate in immoral actions. And then, when they are tired of “cups,” they move back to “civil broils.” The cycle of unrestrained feasting and merciless killing continues until the flood. Such a cycle harkens back to the warring elements of chaos: Chaos and Night hold “Eternal anarchy amidst the noise / Of

endless wars and by confusion stand” (2.896-97). Like the irrational creatures that did not stand “much in awe / Of man” but “Glared on him passing,” the humans do not respect one another as fellow humans, as their equals (10.712-14). Instead, they gave into their own desires without respect, or “awe,” toward themselves or other human beings. Humanity dissolves itself into a form of essential non-being, which means that the humans behave in an increasingly chaotic manner. Their behavior indicates their dissolution into a state of chaos, or non-being. However, they still remain physically alive, hence they retain their essentiality. They become a living chaos, and in that way, they are like Satan: “myself am hell” (4.75). Humans, by volition, disobey God and descend into a state of living chaos. As shown above, God deals with corrupted essences by giving them completely over to chaos via death.

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, all humanity descended deeper into non-being. After much long-suffering, God decides to kill humanity; that is, he causes them to dissolve into chaos. Out of this new abyss, God re-creates the world. Humans sink back into that chaos of non-being from which the Son formed this world. God completely destroys them through the great deluge,⁹⁷ except for Noah and his family. During the flood, “Sea covered sea, / Sea without shore” (11.749-50). The universal flood reminds the reader of that first unbounded flood of chaos. When Sin first opens the infernal doors, Satan and his progeny see “a dark / Illimitable ocean without bound” (2.891-92). This ocean, however, finds its shore at the “farthest verge” of nature, where chaos retires “a broken foe” (2.1038-39). The cosmological chaos has not entered the created world; for God, via curse, creates a flood like that of chaos. The flood too is both a grave and womb. God drowns humanity in the flood, bringing them back into that original state of chaos. God created nature out of chaos, and now he will re-create humanity and the animal

⁹⁷ Schwartz briefly mentions that the flood represents chaos overcoming creation on pp. 37-39.

world out of this new flood. Michael calls the ark “this mount / Of Paradise,” which “by might of waves” shall “be moved” (11.829-30). Although Michael does not use the word “curse,” the function of the flood seems to fit the function of a curse. Concerning hell, the narrator claims that “God by curse / Created evil, for evil only good” (2.622-23). He creates good out of evil, a blessing out of a curse. God curses the world with a universal deluge, and he re-creates out of that mount of Paradise. God dissolves the world into a state of chaos for a time in order to cleanse the world of the draff and filth of humanity.

Although God promises never to flood the earth again, Michael relates that humanity becomes corrupt almost immediately after the flood (11.889-95). Human beings exist in a state of chaos once again. While the “dread of judgment past remains / Fresh in their minds,” Noah’s son Ham committed a “shame / Done to his father.” Then Noah, not God, proclaimed a “heavy curse” on his son and his “vicious race” (12.14-15, 101-04). Noah’s curse seems to function differently from a divine curse, because it does not seem to do anything. Only God’s curse can turn good out of evil. Michael claims that Noah’s family “With some regard to what is just and right / Shall lead their lives and multiply apace” (12.16-17). Despite Ham’s action, they experience “joy unblamed and dwell / Long time in peace” (12.21-22). Chaotic elements are hardly present after the purging of the flood. Nevertheless, the world will “Still tend from bad to worse” (12.105-06). Noah’s progeny descends back into that state of non-being, like the former world’s human population, with the advent of Nimrod.

Perhaps the most startling and revealing of the latter corruptions, which Michael reveals to Adam, is the usurpation of authority by Nimrod,⁹⁸ who is called one “of proud ambitious

⁹⁸ He is not named in the poem, but Milton describes the character Nimrod from Gen. 10:9-10.

heart” (12.25).⁹⁹ Nimrod and his “crew” exhibit attributes of chaos, which shows the denigration of human society back into a state of chaos (12.38). God then gives them over further into chaos to purge the earth of his ambition. Nimrod is “not content / With fair equality” or harmony among human beings (12.25-26). He serves himself and dispossesses “Concord and law of nature from the earth,” which brings discord back into human relationships (12.28-29). If he creates discord, then he dissolves human society into a state closely resembling chaos. Humanity returns to that pre-delugian state. Nimrod makes “war” against those who “refuse / Subjection to his empire tyrannous” (12.31-32). Back in chaos, the “four champions fierce,” the atoms, do not dwell in harmony but “strive for mastery” over each other (2.998-99). The unformed elements seek unjust dominion over one another, and Nimrod does the same on earth.¹⁰⁰ He seems more successful than those atoms, because he conquered his enemies to set up his tyrannical empire. Unbeknown to him, his empire will not exist for long, and he will end up in further confusion, like the atoms.

Besides the unformed particles of chaos, Michael describes Nimrod in Satanic terms as well. Satan and Nimrod create discord, war, and desire to oppress others. Chaos contains all of those attributes. Nimrod and his followers will march to a “plain wherein a black bituminous gurge / Boils out from underground, the mouth of hell” (12.41-42). The image here reminds the reader of Raphael’s depiction of Satan constructing his infernal engines out of “materials dark and crude,” which abide “deep underground (6.478) in heaven. The “mouth of hell” specifically recalls chaos. Raphael relates God saying that his Son will drive the rebellious angels into this “the gulf / Of Tartarus, which ready opens wide / His fiery chaos to receive their fall” (12.54-55).

⁹⁹ Michael describes Nimrod like Satan: “for they weened / That selfsame day by fight or by surprise / To win the mount of God, and on his throne / To set the envier of his state, the proud / Aspirer” (6.86-90).

¹⁰⁰ See John Lilburne’s association between chaotic society and tyranny above.

The mouth of hell is chaos itself. Satan's matter, of course, suggests those "dark materials" of chaos (2.916). Both Satan and Nimrod exert their will over chaos (in a sense) to bring into being unnatural entities, such as an engine or a "tower whose top may reach to Heaven" (12.44). Analogous to the Son's driving Satan and his followers into the realm of chaos, God will drive Nimrod and his followers into a chaos of confusion.

Both Nimrod and Satan fall into chaos. When Satan and his crew fell from heaven, Raphael describes them as loud and confused. He claims that "Hell heard the insufferable noise" and that "Chaos roared / and felt tenfold confusion in their fall" (6.867, 871-72). Confirming Raphael, Chaos earlier describes their fall "not in silence" but as "confusion worse confounded" (2.994-96). Both Chaos and Raphael associate the fall from heaven with loud confusion. Satan and his co-conspirators exhibit chaotic attributes, which signifies their fall from being into a state closer to non-being or chaos. By Book 12, Nimrod and his followers, in Michael's telling, will be cursed with confusion. God sees what they are doing, and he "sets / Upon their tongues a various spirit to raze / Quite out their native language and instead / To sow a jangling noise of words unknown" (12.52-55). All heaven laughed at the "hubbub strange," which harkens back to Raphael's claim that "Heaven rejoiced" at the expulsion of the fallen angels (12.59-60, 6.878). The narrator describes chaos as an "universal hubbub wild," which shows the connections between the confounding of human speech and the realm of chaos (2.951). God cursed those building the tower by having them exhibit more chaotic tropes. They sink into a lesser state of being, like when the rebellious angels fell into chaos. Both Nimrod and Satan with their followers take on the attributes of chaos.

The Son purged his foes out of heaven, because they were disobedient and made war against him. Satan moved toward a chaotic state of existence, and so he does not belong in

heaven any more. In fact, fleeing the Son, “themselves they threw¹⁰¹ / Down from the verge of Heaven” (6.864-65). They jumped into chaos out of fear, and “eternal wrath / burnt after them to the bottomless pit” (6.865-66). If Satan and his fellows exhibit chaotic traits because of their move towards non-entity, then they cannot remain in heaven. God purged heaven of all chaotic elements to make heaven pure from non-being once more. This purging allows the Father to “repair” the loss of angels by creating a new world: Raphael explains that God “ordained / Good out of evil to create, instead / Of spirits malign, a better race to bring / Into their vacant room” (6.152; 7.187-90). Out of the evil of expelling the rebel angels out of heaven, God creates something good. Likewise, God sees that humanity has fallen back into moral and political confusion with Nimrod’s usurping power from his equals. In an effort to heal this breach, God curses humanity with a diversity of language. All the builders become enraged and confused, and then they name the tower “Confusion” (12.62). God causes humanity to dissolve more into a state of non-being, which their state of confusion signifies. Out of this curse of confusion, all different cultures spring into being with their diversified languages. As Adam says concerning ultimate redemption, God “all this good of evil shall produce” (12.470). This clause from Adam fits here well. God creates something out of this curse, like how he created something good after the expulsion of the rebellious angels. Both events harken to the creation of nature out of the dark chaos.

God’s action with Satan and Nimrod reveals a pattern. God curses and then creates: this pattern emerges throughout the remaining lines of Milton’s poem. In trying to describe to Adam why tyranny exists, Michael says that since humans allow “inordinate desires” to rule over “free reason,” God allows tyrants to rule (12.88, 92). A tyrant, such as Nimrod, enthralls his or her

¹⁰¹ Milton emphasizes that Satan and his followers chose chaos over God. Nevertheless, they do not leave until God forces them out.

subjects' "outward liberty," because they choose to disobey right reason, their inward liberty (12.95). However, Michael paradoxically points out that "Tyranny must be, / Though to the tyrant thereby no excuse" (12.95-96). Nimrod will still be judged for his sins even though God allowed him to do them. God, in fact, judges when "nations will decline so low / From virtue, which is reason" (12.97-98). When that happens, he will make "justice and some fatal curse annexed," which "Deprives them of their outward liberty, / Their inward lost" (12.99-101). In other words, when nations descend to a state of chaotic existence, God will curse them in some way. Nimrod and his fellows were such a group that exhibited living chaos, and God cursed them with confusion to stop their evil actions, i.e. the tower. He then curses them by causing them to descend into a deeper state of chaos, out of which God creates which punishes his depraved creation. God curses Israel with war and destruction, which are properties of chaos, when they become depraved. Out of the captivity, he re-creates them. His Son even becomes a curse to re-create and redeem all of humanity and the entire world.

These latter books of *Paradise Lost* tell of a God who sees a world descend into a state of chaos, which means that essential creatures assume attributes of chaos. He then curses it and thereby sends it into a greater state of non-being. The curse causes the fallen creatures to resemble the cosmological chaos even more than before. Out of this cursed state, God creates something new, and this pattern repeats itself to the end of Michael's discourse with Adam.

Conclusion

To bring this paper to a close, Milton wrote in a time of great social upheaval. He witnessed and defended the execution of the king, worked under Cromwell in the Protectorate, and escaped death during the restoration of the monarchy. Social chaos in this period carried the assumption that it is evil and to be avoided. Complicating things, Milton created a good chaos in

Paradise Lost, but its goodness depends on one's perspective. The cosmological chaos is good on account of its ordination by God to exist in such a state of non-being. For creatures, the adornments of chaos, non-being is evil, because it contradicts what God ordained creatures to be. Any move toward non-being, a break in fellowship with God from whom all things receive being, constitutes a dissolution of the creature back into a state of chaos or non-being. In the latter books, Milton follows the pattern of the creation of the world out of chaos, which Raphael describes in Book 7. When humans so degrade themselves that they almost become naught, God curses them by degrading them even further into a state of chaos. He then re-creates humanity out of the new state of chaos, which is typified by the universal deluge of Noah and the narrative of the tower of Babel. This pairing of a good chaos and yet a curse into a chaotic manner of being for the purpose of re-creation shows Milton's idiosyncrasy, especially because he makes this connection so prominent in the end of his great epic.

The connection between tyranny and tropes of chaos mentioned in this paper deserves a much greater discussion. Milton promoted republicanism for nearly all his life, and the degradation of society into a chaotic state under tyrannical rule seems significant. It might be related to John Lilburne's¹⁰² and the Levellers' understanding of tyranny and human rights. I presume that David Williams' new book *Milton's Leveller God* (2017)¹⁰³ would be incredibly useful in expanding this relationship between chaos and tyrannical power.

¹⁰² See note 18 on p. 6

¹⁰³ Published by McGill-Queens UP.